THE MEASURE
A JOURNAL OF POETRY

Poems by Leonie Adams, Lindley Williams Hubbell, Scudder Middleton and Others – – – – – – – –

Water Running Up Hill — A Review of Edith Sitwell's "Sleeping Beauty" – – – – – – – – – –

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Spire of Saint Patrick's and the Moon

CITY of many, two in deep heaven are shown;
Two pearl, two ivory, two brimful light;
The lifting spire and the spellbinding moon,
That weaves in silver the blue airs of night.
The streets are too live lustre for her look,
The perished moon's, that moves kissing the dead;
But this that the passion and the flesh forsook,—
Mary the rose, and the archangels fled,—
Is like unshrouded bones, the austere grace
Which, after the worms, its incorruption found.
O strange mortmain! that living have no place,
But that the dead are shuffled underground.
Earth is our mother; whose corrosive bed
From death to dust woos the disdaining dead.

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The Barouche

SQUARES south the play was done:
Thick the housetops rise
Hemming them; all their way
Northerly lies.

Drenched in sleep the cabman,
Drowsy-heeled the mare,
And half in sleep and dreaming
Travel the fare.

Mournfully, sweetly so,
Midnight to morning goes,
When air has its honey
Of the lilac and rose.

Town is a blackened pool
Hooded with sleep;
And hooves are like bells
With night so deep.

Down every alley corner
Are heavenly gaps laid bare,
They see the clouds driving,
The moon runs there.

Their moon of warmest dusks
And wasting in late skies,
Who now with perishing
Last silver flies.

If he'd a penny given;
For the mare, sweet hay;
And they'd but faith to be
Merry that way.

Discourse with the Heart

1.

LOVE is that innocent whom wounding thorn
Will never stop while violets might blow,
And they are tender; once was not wisdom born
Of wounds? But love's feet pierced are steadfast so.
Most dreamy, delicate, headlong wanderer,
Whose star is but some glitter-trick of tears,
Sleep, and my heart will fold you not to stir,
Like one left magic drowsy till bleak years
Are done, and the round rose tree breaks in flowers,
And bees that brew such honey bear no stings,
And death without, like happy birds the hours,
Like birds, are caged in gold and yet have wings.
Too docile princess! Love breaks sleep by this,
Each instant starting for the enchanted kiss.

2.

Grieved hearts alone to lovers' hearts are kin,
That for no ransom brooded things forego.
If for queen's proudness one be Sorrow's twin,
Or one like her disdaining, Love is so.
Since now most precious mines can give no gold
So absolute but it's made metaphor,
And richer metal by its shining told,
Nor best nor beautiful now the rapt love stir:
Heart, that have loved, nor known it holy part,
(Truth is, live hearts must love as lips shall breathe)
By this shall lift with sanctifying art
Your act of life, who live but to bequeath;
As lips that countless graceless times have fed,
Save themselves hungry, and bite blesséd bread.

Our Lady of Victory

Bread and Butter Letter from a Heretic

NO latch your housedoor kept, nor bar.
Within, you would be standing there,
Grave-eyed and silent as a star.
Touched with dim blue your robings were
And met your gentle feet.
Large was your house, and cool, and fair,
All havoc at an end, and heat.

You would make welcome and not stir,
A bowl, serenely laid upon
Two palms, out to the wanderer,
Of your bright waters' benison.
And though I touched it not,
For old unquiet of your son,
Full rest your pointed hands begot.

And humble now, I was let stay,
Watch your initiate about
Beauty of games they found to play,
On the insurgent grave of doubt.
Your carven sympathy,
The wisdom the tool's trick struck out,
Fell upon these your lambs and me.

This grace there was in line and line,
An old benignancy they wrought
Out of such cry for peace as mine,
Against the loneliness of thought.
All things insensate charm,
For complete me no balm had brought,
Nor birds along the fir tree's arm.

I had by heart green quietude,
And had been comforted within
The ancient lintel of the wood,
By furred and secret minded kin;
There where least hint let slip
Of human puzzlement had been
To sully their blithe comradeship.

Now in its last and lonely seat,
My heart had refuge without shame,
Here where all mortal passionate heat
Was trimmed into a simple flame.
Your face at least was true,
And the old rhymings of your name,
And thought at length was rest for you.

Léonie Adams

Dancers

".....and the King was a philosopher."

HIS high-flung noose had fallen
And the star had not been caught,
Still the unobtainable
Danced upon the air,
Mocking his omnipotence.
From his castle in the world,
He was always gazing there—
Past the white tides of the sky
Where the lost Atlantis floats,
And the days and nights are furled,
And the comets ply. . .

O poor earth with dancers, too,
More grotesquely gay
Than his deathless star—
Not so very far
His noose was flung for you!
Row on row your dancers swung,
Stepping on the air
Where the acorn-monsters writhe,
And the rooks keep out the sun,
And the lean wolves pair.

No Matter

TONIGHT it matters not to me
Whether you be black or red,
Gregarious as the honey bee,
Or strong as water chased by wind
Or independent as a tree,
Or weak as cotton thread—
Stay here, is all I ask of you.
Sit down beside me, share my glass,
Talk gibberish or argue fine,
Draw Rahab on the table-cloth,
Or Euclid's non-existent line,
Or guess the ways of auk and moth,
Or brag about your wheels and gold,
Or sigh for beauty under mold,
Or hawk the secrets of a friend,
Touch my hand, or look away—
I care not what you do or say!
Tonight all values shift and blend,
And I am here without a world.

Walpurgis

THIS lighted room is Brocken, if you knew,
And I the demon that your mind has sought.
Why do you keep Walpurgis with the mole,
Hug devils in a little Hell of thought?

Scudder Middleton

Aquatic

BOX within box I dreamed of sleep,
Dream within dream was fitted.

Within one sleep I woke four times,
Roused by water-muffled chimes.
I floated up from deep to deep,
Dragging my hand each time to keep
The dream, so clear I could have told it
But which I could not pull and take—
As from a slowly moving boat
I would tug at a lily which looks afloat
With a long, tough stem to hold it,
And the lily would scarcely stir.

How do I know, then, I'm awake?
Is this a dream as the others were?
Has it, like them,
A water-lily stem?

Louise Townsend Nicholl

Those Who Have Beauty

TO those who have beauty
I would speak this word:
Do not barter this thing
For the gift of wisdom.
If you had wisdom
It would stay with you always;
If you have beauty
It will leave you soon.
But do not barter this thing
For the gift of wisdom.

Advice

I COULD endure to have you die;
Although I should be much bereft,
Still could I bear it, for I know
There would be so much beauty left.
But, if I might thus far make bold,
I do forbid that you grow old.

Die if you must, for in the earth
Your slow corruption would be hidden;
But to confront my strenuous eye
With beauty's end, you are forbidden.
So if you'd have me hold you dear,
Do not survive your thirtieth year.

Lindley Williams Hubbell

Alien

I HAVE a canopied bed to lay me in,
A dressing-table, valanced in stiff chintz.
My walls are nearly bare. A few pale prints
And queer daguerreotypes, ugly as sin,
Confront me. One has a frost-bitten grin,
One is malevolent, one dourly squints.
Two chairs are painted, straight and hard as flints.
A mirror contorts my face and pulls my skin.

Take me away where no one and nothing is old,
Where something lives other than ancestors,
Where cold is not this long New England cold,
Where, opening out, as well as in, the doors
Do not clutch ruins, where hands do not fold
Meekly upon a lie the heart abhors.

Dorothy Burgess

Two Poems

1.

O TROUBLED heart, the fall with colder breath
Blows in the tassel as the farmers reap.
So in the autumn comes the landsman death,
His step is quiet and his house is sleep.

2.

NOW does the spider's house
Hang gray upon the wall.
The carcass of a louse
Adorns it most of all.

On dry stalks of clover
Or under sunny stones,
October will uncover
The fly's white bones.

(*And in my heart where*
A light web swings
Quiet as the air,
And full of dry wings.)

Robert Nathan

Shadow of Praise

THE light that silvers the gray rain
Is the sun's light, and the long
Straight-shifted shimmer and the stain
Of moon through breezes that belong
To darkness only, is the sun's.
So too, what molten phrase
To name you different runs
In my mind's mould and is praise,
Is nothing that I give,—
No element nor planet born
Of chaos nor contemplative
Division of my heart,—but rather a horn
Of thin moon, beautiful
With your light, which the mark
Of my shape keeps from a full
Moon's circle against the dark.

Cold Night

I KNOW the leaf, the bough
That falls and blows or breaks
Cares little for what wakes
Or sleeps a year from now.

I know the horn of the goose,
The thin dog's smoky bark,
Cries not against the dark
To shake its fingers loose.

I was as sure as they,
Juggling the night-wind's knives.
There were no precious lives
Until I went your way.

But for great strangeness then
Hung over body and mind
I were content with wind
And winter's regimen,

Still in the stiffened grass
Under a folded peace
Where cold and clustering geese
Blow at their watery brass.

Calvin Austin

Lines for a Sun Dial

TO lands where night is not, or noon,
Time as a wind has blown away
Both today and yesterday
Past the gates of sun and moon.
On that distant current, shed
Far as petals tempest torn
Are the blossomed hours borne
Eddying ungarlanded.

Jean M. Batchelor

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Water Running Up Hill

(*The Sleeping Beauty by Edith Sitwell*; *New York*: *Alfred A. Knopf*; *1924*).

The cautious critic, brought before Edith Sitwell's poetry or Strawinsky's music, is abashed. Here is a new, fantastic drive toward a loveliness intricate but unlabored. Strawinsky makes the orchestra into two barrel-organs that play a duet. Edith Sitwell brazenly swings her meaning on the hinges of her rhymes. "It is noise," cries the critic of one, "It is nonsense," of the other.

Edith Sitwell's *Sleeping Beauty* is a fairy-tale wherein "Destiny is wingless." The story in the child's primer proceeds according to a law much like reason. The fantastic happens, but the expected triumphs. The prince gives his kiss. The princess wakes. Miss Sitwell's poem is encased from the world's accidents and consequences very rigidly. She is tired of water that goes crashing over the verge, blinding and loud. She is tired of human faces, of human antics, of human loss. She is not weary from listlessness or snobbery, but because she has suffered too much,—she cannot bear to be touched again. So she compares the changing to the fixed, the soft-colored living thing to something hard, inanimate and bright. She has given her poppets music-boxes instead of hearts and has set them in a country-side full of muslin waterfalls and painted grass.

In that place who dares whisper reality? Emotion may crash tiresomely outside, but this world is a world of clowns, carrousel animals and clever clock-work birds. Broken jugs fly together whole; the flowers in the garden cackle as well as the fowl; water runs up hill. The princess sleeps on forever. No one ever finds her; she is lost and forgotten.

Throughout the glittering maze, Miss Sitwell knows precisely what she wishes to do. The stanzas open and close upon their rhymes like panels of a screen. Flummery is completely absent, together with all pompous reasonableness . . . The wicked fairy lays her curse upon the little princess. She will prick her finger upon a spindle and fall asleep. All the spindles of the palace are broken. But one day when the princess is eighteen . . .

Then suddenly without warning the poppet world breaks. We hear a cry, in a human voice, for lost innocence:

> "And sometimes terrible lumbering Darkness comes
> "Breaking the trivial matchboard floors that hide
> "From us the dead we dare not look upon.
> "O childish eyes, O cold and murdered face
> "Dead innocence and youth that were our own."

This for a moment. The bright bells begin to ring again in the poet's head . . . It is a warm afternoon. The princess plays with a golden ball under dark garden trees. . .

This agony uttered by human tongue is new in Miss Sitwell's work. She has always had wit, very dark or very bright, like the mottle in tortoiseshell. But her baroque girls with gilded hair had no season of torture and death. It was in stiff metaphor that innocency was dead. Here it lies slain in the simple word.

At the end, nothing is proved or solved. Cydalise sleeps in abandoned ground "within the bear-dark forests;" ragged Jane, the maid with the coxcomb hair, sleeps in her attic; the queen sleeps "under the low deep bough." No one hears; everything is forgotten. The gardener ends his tale as he began it:

> "The gardener plays his old bag-pipe
> "To make the melons and the peaches ripe. .
> "The threads are mixed in a tartan sound."

but now his song goes backward, and ends at its beginning.

All this is to be heard, not explained. Miss Sitwell has protected us for a little from reality: "The saturnine cold laughter of the water."

Louise Bogan

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